

Self-Disclosure Among Social Media Influencers in Padang City: A Phenomenological Study of Forms, Motivations, Impacts, and Challenges

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Keywords:

Emotional needs
Extroversion
Influencer
Self-disclosure
Social media

ABSTRACT

This study examines how three Padang-based influencers Bintang Fakhirin, Ni Mida (Ratu Deslim), and Wahyu Hidayat negotiate self-disclosure within a collectivist cultural context. Using a phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews conducted in May 2024 revealed four key themes: forms of disclosure, motivations, perceived impacts, and challenges. Findings show that disclosure is driven by emotional needs, extroverted personalities, and economic opportunities, but constrained by communal judgment, linguistic stigmatization, and phone dependence. These practices reflect a negotiation between authenticity and cultural expectations, aligning with Altman and Taylor's Social Penetration Theory, DeVito's disclosure dimensions, and Goffman's dramaturgical model. By situating self-disclosure within the Minangkabau cultural setting, the study highlights how collectivist values and the principle of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah* shape digital practices. Practically, it underscores the importance of culturally sensitive strategies, digital literacy, and psychosocial support.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of social media has reshaped patterns of interaction, income generation, and self-presentation. In Indonesia, where internet penetration surpassed 221 million users in 2024 [1], [2], social

media platforms have become deeply embedded in social and cultural life. One of the most notable phenomena emerging from this development is the rise of social media influencers, who depend heavily on self-disclosure to cultivate trust, attract engagement, and sustain their public image. However, this dependency also exposes influencers to dilemmas involving privacy, reputation, and cultural scrutiny, making self-disclosure a complex and contested practice.

Existing research often focuses on the commercial effects of self-disclosure, such as its impact on consumer trust, parasocial relationships, and brand loyalty [3], [4]. While these studies are valuable, they primarily reduce disclosure to a marketing tool, overlooking the lived experiences and social negotiations of influencers themselves. Disclosure is not always a voluntary act of sharing; in many cases, it is shaped by audience expectations, platform algorithms, and competitive pressures. These conditions create vulnerabilities, including reputational risks, online harassment, and even legal sanctions when disclosure content clashes with social norms or regulations [5], [6], [7], [8], [9]. Thus, there is a pressing need to shift scholarly focus toward the broader social and cultural dimensions of influencer disclosure.

Another limitation in the literature is its strong emphasis on Western contexts, where individualistic values often normalize overt self-promotion and personal expression [10]. In contrast, Indonesia's collectivist orientation introduces unique challenges for influencers. Cultural expectations of modesty, religious observance, and communal accountability complicate decisions about what to reveal and what to withhold. Failure to consider these cultural dimensions risks producing an incomplete understanding of disclosure practices in non-Western contexts. The absence of such perspectives constitutes a significant research gap, particularly in collectivist societies where online visibility intersects strongly with moral and communal judgment [11]. As emphasized by von Suchodoletz & Hepach (2021), cultural orientations significantly shape socio-emotional development and modes of interpersonal communication, underscoring the need to examine how disclosure practices are influenced by broader cultural contexts. These gaps highlight the importance of situating research within specific cultural settings, such as Padang City, where traditional values intersect with digital practices.

Padang City provides a critical case for addressing this gap. As the capital of West Sumatra, Padang is deeply influenced by Minangkabau

traditions, which emphasize communal harmony, religious adherence, and matrilineal social structures [13]. These cultural values shape community perceptions of influencers, often amplifying scrutiny of their public disclosures. Local dynamics also reveal that influencers in Padang face heightened scrutiny when their disclosures intersect with sensitive cultural and religious values. In Minangkabau culture, communal norms and religious adherence play a central role in shaping how public expressions are received [14]. These values often amplify the scrutiny directed at influencers, making disclosure a potential site of conflict between personal branding strategies and societal expectations. At the same time, Padang-based influencers incorporate cultural identity, humor, and local traditions into their content, making their practices distinct from those in larger metropolitan areas like Jakarta. This duality between opportunity and restriction makes Padang an especially relevant setting for examining the tensions of influencer disclosure.

Research on influencers in Indonesia has so far been dominated by studies conducted in urban centers such as Jakarta, leaving smaller yet culturally rich regions underexplored. This neglect risks portraying influencer culture in a homogenized manner, without recognizing the contextual dynamics that shape self-disclosure in different regions. Consequently, there is limited knowledge about how influencers in culturally conservative contexts manage the contradictions between audience expectations, platform demands, and community norms. This study seeks to fill that gap by focusing specifically on influencers in Padang City.

To address this gap, the present research investigates how Padang-based influencers experience and negotiate self-disclosure in their professional and personal lives. It examines four dimensions: the forms of disclosure they adopt, the motivations driving these choices, the perceived benefits of disclosure for personal and professional identity, and the challenges encountered in balancing authenticity with cultural and professional pressures. By employing a phenomenological approach, this study highlights influencers' voices and lived experiences, offering insights often overlooked in consumer-centered analyses.

The contributions of this research are twofold. First, it enriches the theoretical discourse on self-disclosure by situating the phenomenon within a collectivist cultural context. Second, it provides practical implications for influencers, policymakers, and digital literacy advocates

by identifying the ethical, cultural, and psychological dilemmas inherent in influencer disclosure. Ultimately, this study underscores the necessity of context-sensitive research to capture the full complexity of influencer practices, which are simultaneously shaped by global digital trends and deeply local cultural realities.

2. METHOD

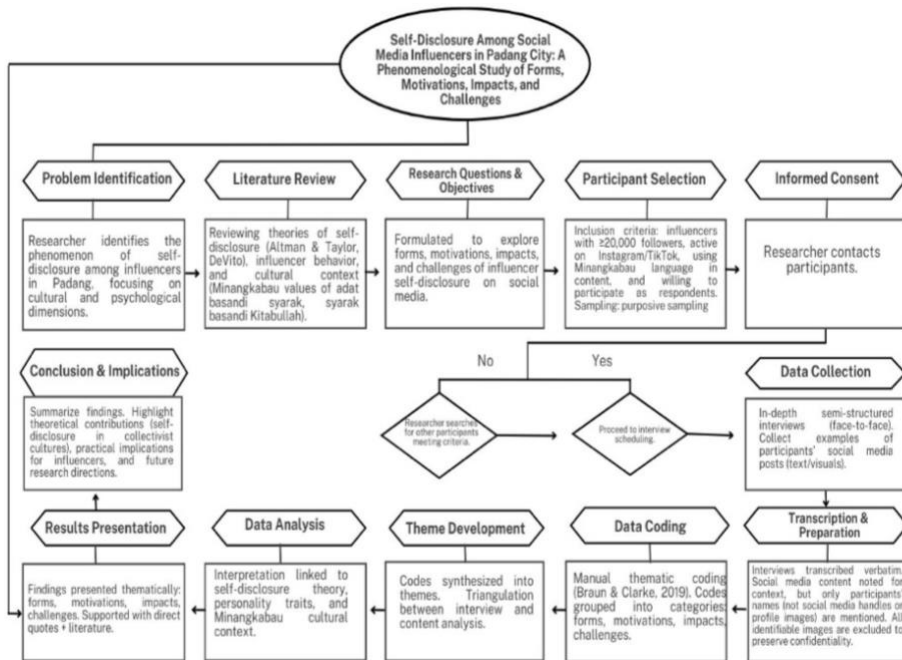


Figure 1. Research Flowchart

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach, which is well-suited for exploring lived experiences and the meanings individuals attach to their practices [15]. Phenomenology aligns with the research objectives, as this study seeks to uncover how influencers in Padang subjectively experience and negotiate self-disclosure within cultural and professional contexts.

Phenomenology aligns with the research objectives, as this study seeks to uncover how influencers in Padang subjectively experience and negotiate self-disclosure within cultural and professional contexts [16]. Three influencers from Padang City were chosen based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) residence and active practice in Padang City; (2) follower count above 20,000, ensuring significant visibility; (3) consistent

posting of content involving personal or lifestyle themes, with a focus on producing content that uses the Minangkabau language in their posts; and (4) willingness to participate and provide informed consent. While the number of participants may seem limited, phenomenological studies often prioritize depth over breadth, with smaller samples allowing for intensive exploration [17]. Saturation of key themes was observed when similar patterns consistently appeared across interviews [18].

Data collection relied on in-depth semi-structured interviews, conducted in May 2024. Each session lasted approximately 60–90 minutes. The interviews began with broad, open-ended questions about participants' experiences as influencers, allowing them to narrate freely about their practices, challenges, and motivations. Probing questions were used to encourage elaboration when necessary, but no rigid domains were imposed in advance. Instead, the themes of forms of disclosure, motivations, perceived impacts, and challenges emerged inductively during the analytic process rather than being predefined. Open-ended questions were designed to elicit detailed narratives, and follow-up probes were used flexibly to clarify meanings. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim, following recommended practices for ensuring accuracy and reliability [19].

Thematic analysis was employed as the primary analytic framework, following Braun & Clarke (2019), a reflexive approach. Transcripts were manually coded line-by-line to identify initial codes. Codes were clustered into categories and refined iteratively into higher-order themes through constant comparison and memo writing. Themes were developed inductively from the data while remaining sensitive to prior research on self-disclosure and collectivist cultural practices. Manual coding was chosen over software-based analysis to emphasize transparency and close engagement with the data. This decision is supported by recent methodological guidance showing that manual approaches, when systematically documented, can be as rigorous as software-assisted analysis while providing greater familiarity with the dataset [21].

This research adhered to the ethical principles of psychological research. All participants provided written informed consent, having been fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. They were also informed of their right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Furthermore, participants were granted explicit

permission to include their names and social media profiles in academic publications.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

The results are presented in four main themes derived from interview data and supported by illustrative quotes: (1) forms of self-disclosure, (2) motivations for disclosure, (3) perceived impacts, and (4) challenges. Participants in this study were three influencers from Padang City who met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate in in-depth interviews. They were: Bintang Fakhirin (74,000 followers), Ratu Deslim al, so known as Ni Mida (183,000 followers), and Wahyu Hidayat (198.000 followers). Each theme reflects recurring patterns across participants while also capturing individual nuances.

3.1.1. Forms of Disclosure

Participants engaged in diverse forms of disclosure, categorized into curated daily routines, expressive emotional sharing, and strategic identity markers.

Table 1. Forms of Self-Disclosure

Category	Examples	Illustrative Quote
Curated daily routines	Meals, fashion, leisure	"Most of my content is just daily routines, but I add my own story to make it different." (Bintang)
Expressive emotional sharing	Stress, frustrations, reflections	"When I complain about my thesis online, it feels like therapy." (Wahyu)
Strategic identity markers	Minangkabau language, humor, family	"I deliberately use Minang words... I combine them with a Korean accent." (Ni Mida)

Bintang chooses to create content by responding to humorous and viral videos circulating on social media. He then adds a creative twist by incorporating elements of a romantic drama storyline, often involving another viral account, to make the content more appealing and engaging. Wahyu shares content in his own distinctive style, often expressing his personal frustrations as a student struggling to complete his thesis. In addition, he is known for his involvement in the Stand-Up Comedy scene in West Sumatra, where he delivers humorous commentary and

occasionally engages in “roasting,” a comedic technique used to satirize public figures, including government officials. Uni Mida is a unique content creator who is recognized for incorporating the Minangkabau language with a Korean accent in her videos. She typically produces content related to cooking or daily activities with her husband, consistently using the Korean accent as a signature style. This distinctive approach has captured the interest of her followers, making her content more engaging and memorable.

Participants disclosed themselves through curated routines, emotional expression, and strategic identity markers. These forms often overlapped, revealing both personal authenticity and performance-driven strategies. This aligns with prior studies indicating that influencers balance private sharing with strategic image crafting [22]. The use of the Minangkabau language illustrates how influencers localize global digital practices, reinforcing both cultural pride and audience relatability. Unlike in Western contexts, where self-disclosure often emphasizes individuality [10], here disclosure practices are embedded in communal and cultural expectations. Such experiences show how local language use can simultaneously be a source of connection and vulnerability.

3.1.2. *Motivations for Disclosure*

Motivations for disclosure were complex and multi-layered. Participants described (1) relational motivations, such as maintaining closeness with followers; (2) emotional motivations, including coping with personal struggles such as breakups; (3) economic motivations, including brand collaborations; and (4) personality-driven motivations, such as extroversion and enjoyment of attention.

Table 2. Motivations for Self-Disclosure

Motivation	Description	Illustrative Quote
Relational	Build closeness with followers	“The positive responses kept me going.” (Bintang)
Emotional	Coping mechanism	“Sharing content was my way to move on.” (Bintang)
Economic	Endorsements, business opportunities	“I got my first paid promotion from a local brand.” (Wahyu)
Personality	Extroversion, humor, attention-seeking	“I’ve always loved being the loudest in the group.” (Ni Mida)

Participants' motivations reflected both personal needs and social rewards. This resonates with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where belonging and esteem motivate disclosure [23]. Extroverted traits also reinforce tendencies toward openness online [24]. Beyond psychological and relational motives, economic incentives emerged as a strong driver. Influencers highlighted the tangible benefits of endorsements, paid promotions, and even algorithm-based monetization features offered by TikTok and Instagram, such as livestream gifts, brand collaborations, and affiliate marketing links. These opportunities transform personal disclosure into marketable content, allowing influencers to sustain themselves financially. This is consistent with Abidin [25], who notes that self-disclosure has become an integral part of the influencer economy.

3.1.3. Perceived Impacts of Disclosure

Participants reported both positive and negative impacts. Positively, disclosure fostered parasocial intimacy, audience loyalty, and increased engagement metrics. Many influencers also reported economic opportunities through endorsements and collaborations.

Table 3. Perceived Impacts of Disclosure

Impact Type	Description	Illustrative Quote
Positive	Endorsements, stronger confidence, collaborations	"One of the positive impacts is income from local businesses." (Wahyu)
Negative	Online hate, reputational vulnerability	"Sometimes people mock the way I talk." (Ni Mida) <i>"When old photos with my ex resurfaced, people assumed wrong things about me. That damaged my image."</i> (Bintang)

Self-disclosure produced both empowering and challenging consequences. Positive impacts included confidence, social capital, and financial opportunities, echoing Rafenda & Simamora (2022). This also aligns with Utz (2015), who found that online self-presentation strengthens social ties and enhances perceived popularity. These findings are consistent with studies showing that influencer lifestyles affect credibility and consumer trust [4]. This duality reflects Hossain et al.'s

(2023) argument that influencer practices are inherently precarious. In the Padang context, reputational risks are heightened because online behavior is evaluated communally, where social media functions as a *ruang komunal* (communal sphere) for sustaining interaction and reinforcing social control [26], [27]. Thus, alongside endorsements and follower trust, influencers face heightened vulnerability to communal criticism and reputational damage.

3.1.4 Challenges

Table 4. Challenges of Disclosure

Challenge	Description	Illustrative Quote
Cultural taboos	Modesty, religious expectations	"For me, love life is something followers don't need to know." (Bintang)
Public expectations	Strain of maintaining image	"People think I'm arrogant... but I'm just tired." (Wahyu)
Psychological strain	Social media and phone addiction	"Sometimes my husband complains because I spend hours replying." (Ni Mida)
Audience hostility	Criticism during livestreams	"When we go live, people curse us... they say we are not polite." (Wahyu)

Challenges revealed cultural, social, and psychological struggles. The guiding principle of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah*, which frames custom as grounded in Islamic law, underscores how behavior is morally and communally evaluated. Online hate and criticism directed at influencers, often mocking their accent or dialect, reflect broader communal judgment rather than isolated opinions.

As explained by Maulana (2025) in an official publication from the Government of Pesisir Selatan Regency, communication in Minangkabau society has shifted "from surau to social media," reinforcing the role of digital platforms as communal arenas for sustaining interaction and social control. In this sense, reputational judgments are amplified, and influencers must continuously negotiate their image under collective scrutiny. This is consistent with Baym (in Wayne, 2011), who highlights the communal negotiation of identity in digital contexts.

At the same time, the psychological strain of constant smartphone dependence emerged as a distinct challenge. Participants described

compulsive scrolling, difficulty detaching from their phones, and conflict with family members due to excessive time spent online. Such experiences echo Wacks & Weinstein (2021), who documented correlations between excessive screen time, anxiety, and diminished well-being.

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that self-disclosure among influencers in Padang City is shaped by four interconnected themes: forms of disclosure, motivations, perceived impacts, and challenges. Each theme highlights how personal expression, cultural context, and economic imperatives intersect in the everyday practices of digital influencers. To illustrate this relationship, a thematic map of research findings was developed.

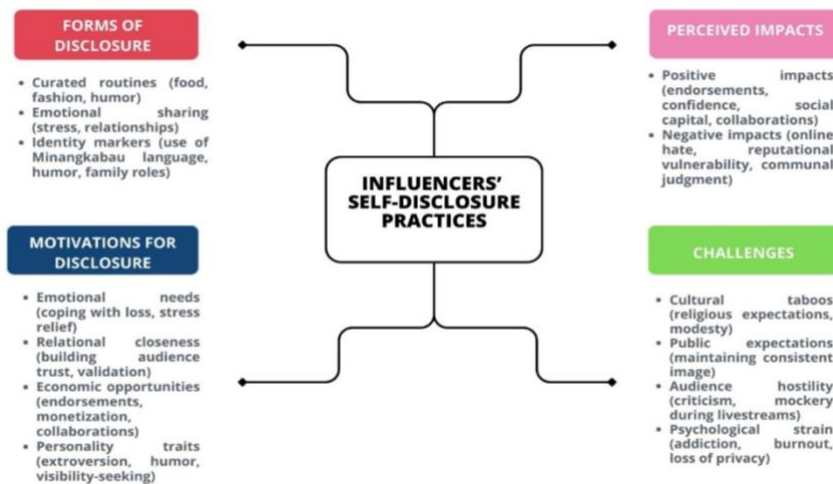


Figure 2. Thematic map of research findings

This structure illustrates how disclosure operates simultaneously as a source of empowerment and vulnerability, shaped by both digital platform dynamics and cultural context.

The results resonate strongly with classical self-disclosure theories. Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory explains disclosure as a gradual process of peeling back layers of personal information. Influencers in this study showed selective disclosure, balancing between superficial content (humor, cooking, entertainment) and deeper revelations (emotions, frustrations), reflecting this layered approach. Similarly, DeVito (2016) emphasizes that disclosure involves dimensions such as amount, valence, accuracy, intention, and intimacy. These

dimensions are evident in how participants disclosed selectively to maintain their reputations while engaging audiences emotionally.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs helps explain disclosure as a response to emotional and relational needs [23]. Personality theory also plays a role: extroverted traits, as highlighted by Rahardjo et al. (2020) aligned with participants' openness to sharing. At the same time, the strategic use of language and cultural markers illustrates Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory. In this framework, social interaction is likened to a stage performance, where individuals engage in impression management by highlighting certain aspects of themselves while concealing others. Influencers in Padang City can be understood as performing on a 'digital front stage' when presenting curated and humorous content to gain approval, while simultaneously maintaining a 'back stage' where more private frustrations or vulnerabilities are withheld. This dramaturgical perspective helps explain how influencers strategically balance authenticity and image management in response to both audience expectations and cultural norms.

The duality of disclosure being both empowering and precarious supports Hossain et al.'s (2023) notion of influencer labor as inherently unstable. While disclosure generates economic opportunities through endorsements and collaborations, it simultaneously exposes influencers to heightened reputational risks, especially in the Padang context. Here, online spaces function as *ruang komunal* (communal spheres), where behavior is collectively monitored and judged [27]. The Minangkabau philosophy of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah*, reinforces these communal norms, amplifying scrutiny of influencers' online behavior.

Unlike Western contexts where individualistic values normalize self-promotion [10], collectivist cultural expectations in Padang City complicate disclosure. Influencers must constantly negotiate between authenticity and cultural propriety, balancing personal expression with communal accountability. Ni Mida's use of the Minang language with a Korean accent, for example, reflects both creative identity performance and a source of vulnerability to mockery. Similarly, Wahyu and Bintang's livestream experiences show how communal audiences actively enforce norms, often through harsh comments that reinforce cultural expectations of modesty and respect. These findings echo Miller et al. (2016), who

emphasize that cultural scripts strongly regulate online self-presentation, particularly in collectivist societies.

Furthermore, recent studies highlight how Southeast Asian digital practices intertwine with moral evaluation, where social media platforms double as spaces of both economic opportunity and communal surveillance [34]. This suggests that influencers' strategies cannot be understood purely through psychological or economic frameworks but must be contextualized within cultural systems that define what is considered acceptable or offensive.

This study is limited by its small sample size, focusing on three influencers in Padang City. While this is consistent with phenomenological approaches that privilege depth over breadth, future research could broaden participation or adopt comparative designs across regions to capture variation in disclosure practices. Data collection also relied on self-reported narratives, which may introduce recall bias or impression management. Although manual thematic coding allowed for close engagement with the data, intercoder reliability was not established. Incorporating multiple coders or software-assisted coding could strengthen methodological rigor.

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored how three Padang-based influencers, Bintang Fakhirin, Ni Mida (Ratu Deslim), and Wahyu Hidayat, negotiate self-disclosure practices within the cultural setting of Minangkabau society. By examining forms, motivations, impacts, and challenges of disclosure, the findings demonstrate that influencers' online practices are deeply shaped by communal expectations, cultural norms, and the principle of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah*. Self-disclosure emerged not merely as an individual act but as a socially embedded performance, continuously mediated by audience judgment and collective values.

Theoretically, this research enriches classical self-disclosure frameworks, such as Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory and DeVito's (2016) disclosure dimensions, by situating them within a collectivist context. Findings reveal that influencers balance between front-stage performances (humorous, curated, and identity-based content) and backstage management of vulnerabilities, echoing Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model. While disclosure enabled authenticity, economic opportunities, and

social connection, it also heightened reputational risks, online harassment, and linguistic stigmatization. This duality highlights how disclosure in collectivist societies is entangled with cultural identity, communal accountability, and reputational control, offering a counterpoint to Western-centric models that often normalize overt self-promotion.

Practically, the study underscores the need for influencers to adopt culturally sensitive strategies that balance authenticity with prudence. Businesses seeking collaborations should consider not only audience reach but also cultural resonance and potential reputational risks for influencers. For policymakers and mental health practitioners, the findings emphasize the importance of providing psychosocial support and digital literacy initiatives to mitigate emotional strain, online harassment, and the addictive use of social media.

The study's limitations include its small sample size and focus on a single geographic context, which limit broader generalizability. While appropriate for phenomenological inquiry, future research could expand across regions, include larger and more diverse samples, and examine differences between collectivist and individualist contexts. Additional methodological rigor, such as inter-rater reliability checks, would further strengthen future work.

In conclusion, this research contributes by demonstrating how influencers in Padang navigate the duality of empowerment and constraint in digital self-disclosure. By grounding the analysis in local cultural values, it advances scholarly understanding of self-disclosure in non-Western collectivist contexts and provides insights for influencers, businesses, and policymakers seeking to engage responsibly in the digital era.

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